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ABSTRACT

If educators are to fulfill their responsibilities to gifted children and youth, they must come to grips with related issues and questions when planning curriculum and instruction to prepare children and youth for the future. Among those issues and questions are: comprehensive curriculum planning for gifted children; total curriculum planning (as opposed to "pull-out" programs); understanding of the multiple dimensions of cognitive and affective growth; the need for both acceleration and enrichment in programs for gifted students; individualized instruction; effects of educational climate; training of all teachers to work with the gifted; and resources and materials for instruction which exists outside the gifted student's classroom and school. These issues, and many more, such as the need for teaching moral and ethical dimensions of modern technology, leadership skills, global perspective and understandings, and the threat of war, affect the development of curriculum for teaching gifted students to cope with and succeed in the future. (CB)

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Issues and Trends in Curriculum for the Gifted

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Some years ago, I was asked to write a piece for the Review of Educational Research which the editor liked but wrote that he did not find a section reporting on trends in curriculum development. I responded saying that I had not found any trends. He wrote back that every article concluded with trends. So, I made up eleven trends. The editor was very pleased and I soon found my trends being quoted in a number of textbooks on curriculum development. That experience has made me cautious ever since about reporting trends since my feeling is that they are more often hopes than actual trends. Consequently, I will deal more with issues or questions than with trends.

I would like to think that there is a trend toward more comprehensive curriculum planning for the gifted than the unarticulated, isolated, fragmentary provisions we have found too often in the past.

I would like to think that there is a trend toward total curriculum planning and not just planning for that portion of the student's experience in that part of his/her program we call "gifted education." Differentiated curriculum, differentiated learning opportunities are needed throughout the gifted student's learning day, not just when he/she is in a pullout program, a special class, or some other so-called "program."

I would like to think that we have come to understand the multiple dimensions of cognitive and affective growth so that our goals for the

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A presentation made at the National Association for Gifted Children Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada, on November 6, 1986.

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gifted go beyond high academic achievement and include creative, productive behaviors of many kinds which represent the realization of potential in many socially valuable areas.

I would like to think that we have discarded the perennial argument of acceleration versus enrichment and have focused instead on deepening our understandings of what constitutes an adequate and appropriate learning experience for a particular individual, when and how that experience can and should be accelerated, when and how that experience can and should be enriched in depth and/or breadth.

I would like to think that we are developing educational programs for the gifted which, as Martin Dishart has put it are "based upon the needs of individual learners, rather than upon making up for program deficiencies in a curriculum for the nongifted." There is, he reminds us, "a resultant difference between enriching and accelerating an inadequate curriculum and designing an adequate and appropriate curriculum in the first place."

I would like to think that we have come to understand the importance of the climate and the environment in implementing challenging learning experiences for the gifted and have come to understand the dimensions of a climate for excellence which has real meaning and is not merely a shibboleth.

I would like to think that we have come to understand that every teacher must be a teacher of the gifted and not just those individuals who have a special responsibility for teaching the gifted.

And, I would like to think that we have come to understand that the curriculum for the gifted extends beyond the confines of the classroom and

the school into the rich resources of the many non-school educative agencies--the family, the community, the media, museums and libraries, religious institutions, laboratories, studios, to name a few.

Yes, I would like to think all of these things about the curriculum for the gifted--the what and the how of teaching and learning--hoping that we have come to understand the differences between instructional provisions and administrative provisions so that we do not confuse the two. There are other things I would like to believe about curriculum and teaching for the gifted and these, together with the few I have mentioned above, might constitute some "trends in curriculum for the gifted."

But, there are still a great many questions and issues about which I would like us to think. Time is limited so I will just raise a few.

On Tuesday, Jack Anderson spoke persuasively about the critical need "to educate our children and youth for the future." For what kind of future? Toward what goals and ends should our education for the gifted be directed? Toward what knowledge, skills, understandings, values, insights, self-concepts should our education for the gifted be directed? If the gifted are to be "our leaders of tomorrow," for what kinds of leadership should we be educating them? Is it sufficient for them to be creative, productive scientists or should we be concerned with their morality, their ethics, their social responsibility as well?

Will our nation be at less risk if we increase the number of courses in science, mathematics, and technology our gifted take or must the curriculum provide a qualitatively different kind of mathematics and science which includes moral and aesthetic as well as knowledge dimensions?

Although we find it difficult to comprehend the real meaning of the "knowledge explosion," we do know that such an explosion is occurring? How do we deal with this knowledge explosion in the curriculum other than acknowledge that it is occurring? What criteria do we use to select content and processes for inclusion in the curriculum from the exponentially increasing knowledge base? How do we teach our gifted youngsters about the nature of knowledge? About theories of knowledge? About how knowledge is produced?

What kind of balance is appropriate for gifted students with respect to the study of science, mathematics and technology on the one hand and humanities, aesthetics, and communication on the other? What kind of balance is needed between cognitive and affective learnings, between intellectual and moral-ethical goals?

In a world beset with problems--the possibility of nuclear annihilation, terrorism, widespread hunger and disease, environmental pollution, totalitarian regimes, disinformation, etc.--what kinds of curricular experiences will nurture consciousness, concern, personal responsibility and commitment among our gifted students so that they will not blindly ignore these threats to the survival of humanity and will feel the need to use their creative, productive talents toward the resolution of these problems? What kind of curriculum will build strong self-concepts, sound mental health, and self-actualization so that the gifted will have "sound minds in sound bodies." What kind of curriculum teaches individuals the skills of cooperative behavior rather than adversarial behavior?

Jack Anderson spoke movingly about the children and youth in the United States and Russia both wanting the same things in a world without the threat of war. What kind of curriculum will foster the concepts of peace, of cooperation, of sharing and caring? What kind of curriculum will build a continuing concern on the part of the gifted and a commitment to work toward building societies which cooperate in resolving humankind's problems? How do we educate for cooperation rather than for domination and competition?

The New York Times recently carried a letter in which the writer was trying to come to grips with the concept of a national debt of trillions of dollars. She tried thinking about one dollar bills piled on top of each other but got hopelessly lost. Then she thought of counting each dollar of debt as a second, thinking of 60 seconds to the minute, 60 minutes to the hour, 24 hours to the day, 365 days to the year, a 1000 years to a millenium. Our national debt which has been more than doubled during the present administration, would constitute 35,000 years! What does such a national debt mean for our future? For the future of all humankind? What kind of curriculum will help gifted students understand the meaning of such concepts, or do we ignore them?

What do the nuclear stockpiles mean for the future of humankind? Do we have any idea other than the information that "leaders should be trusted to see that we are not erased from this earth?" What kind of curriculum will help our gifted students become issue-oriented, willing and able to examine and understand the vital issues which individuals and societies face and to attempt to come to grips with them?

What kind of curriculum will help the gifted understand the moral and ethical dimensions of modern technology and not be seduced by the possibilities of the technology itself?

What kind of curriculum will nurture the skills of leadership in our gifted? Leadership toward what kinds of goals? Leadership coupled with responsibility--personal and social?

What kind of curriculum will nurture global perspectives and understandings? If we indeed are "one planet, one family," what kind of curricular experiences will contribute to bringing that notion to a reality instead of a pious phrase?

Hollingworth and others claim that gifted children have the potential for greater and more profound ethical concerns? What kind of curriculum will help gifted children realize that potential and become more caring, more loving, more committed, more involved human beings?

We all agree that the world in the 21st century will be different from today's world--that is, if it has not blown itself up by then, or if it has not depleted its natural resources by then, or if it has not become dangerously polluted by then, or if a number of other potential catastrophes have not occurred by then. What kind of curriculum will help our gifted children acquire the skills of future thinking?

What kind of curriculum will nourish the learning-how-to-learn skills, the higher order thinking skills, the creativity, the motivation and the drive needed if the gifted student is to function as a productive contributor to society? What kind of curriculum will foster positive self-concepts, self-direction, independence, a love of learning, a desire to experiment with ideas and with things?

We have made considerable progress in developing curriculum and instruction for the gifted since my colleagues and I published Planning for Talented Youth some thirty-one years ago. That publication raised a number of questions and issues about all aspects of planning for the gifted. The time has now come to think about different questions. If we are to fulfill our responsibilities to gifted children and youth, we must now come to grips with issues and questions like these in planning curriculum and instruction to prepare our children and youth for the future.

Thank you for permitting me to share my concerns with you this afternoon.